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XI. DEATH AND FINAL FUNERAL CEREMONIES

a. Death.

When people among us die, our women cry awfully; they cry alas, alas; they wail, they beat their breast, they knock their forehead against the ground; they sing mourning songs, mentioning various matters. When a mother is dead, they cry:

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Alas, alas, my milk tree,
My milk tree, O mother, fell down.
Going in which direction
Might I catch sight of the form of the milk tree?

Alas, alas, up to now
Like a hen-mother she covered us with her wings.
To-day, O mother, like chickens,
To-day, O mother, you shook us off and left us.

Alas, alas, up to now
When we came from anywhere,
Our mother sitting in the door
Was meeting us with caresses like maena chickens.

When a father has died, they cry in the same way:

Alas, alas, the author of my life,
The author of my life left us to-day.
Going in which direction
Might I catch sight of the form of the author of my life?

When the husband dies, the mistress of the house will cry:

Alas, alas, my shading umbrella,
My shading umbrella, O mother, is blown away.
Going in which direction
Might I catch sight of the form of my shading umbrella?

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Alas, alas, my pigeon-mate,
My pigeon-mate and I, our pair is broken.
Going in which direction
Might I catch sight of the form of my pigeon-mate?

When children die, their mother cries:

Alas, alas, my parakeet,
My parakeet, O mother, flew away.
Going in which direction
Might I catch sight of the form of my parakeet?

They mention again and again various griefs of their heart, not what they have heard from others: just what at the moment comes up in their heart, this they mention in their lamentation.

b. The cremation.

764 We cremate people on the day they die. We inform the village headman and his deputy, and these two give the Godet an order: Do call the people together, we shall go to carry firewood in such and such a house. And they assemble in the house of death, taking axes with them. The women of that house grind turmeric and roast cotton seed and paddy. The men catch a fowl, apply fire to a straw-rope and pull out some thatching-grass from the eaves; the roasted cotton-seed and paddy and the thatching-grass from the eaves and the fowl they place in a worn-out winnowing-fan. And what the people of the house send with the dead one, all this they place on the bedstead, viz., clothes, a brass-cup, rupees, pice, a battle-axe, bow and arrows, a stick, a flute and all his implements. When they have finished arranging all this, four men come in, and taking hold of the four bedstead-legs they carry the dead one out; when they have brought him out into the courtyard, they carry him on the bedstead on their shoulders to the junction of roads at the end of the village street; here they put him down for a short while. Here all the women of the house and of the village anoint him with oil and turmeric, and they put a sindur mark on his forehead, and the roasted cotton seeds and paddy they drop down in small heaps at the four bedstead-legs.

[756] Thereupon an ojha exorcises the dead one with the fowl mentioned, waving it three times round over him. Now the women return home, and the men carry the dead one on their shoulders to the place where he is to be cremated. If the man has a low rice-field with running water, they will cremate him there, and if he has not, then at a river. There they build the funeral pyre running North and South, after having cut wood. At the four corners they fix four posts to prevent it from falling down. These they call pyre-corner-posts. Thereupon they wash the hands and feet of the heir of the dead one; they

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775 In the cases of the rest (viz. those in Heaven), they have to stay there till the third generation. To make the position clear, we should remember that the Santals worship ancestor-spirits upto the grandfather (inclusive). When with the death of the house-holder and the consequent change in generations, the particular man in *Serma* (Heaven) does not any more receive propitiation on earth, his period of stay lasts till then. To illustrate the matter, let us take a concrete case. A house-holder worships ancestor-spirits upto his grandfather X. When the house-holder dies and becomes an ancestor-spirit himself, X becomes a great-grandfather to the son of the house-holder (now dead) and is re-born on the earth.

Conclusion

776 777 Such in brief are the funeral ceremonies, and the ideas of Heaven and Hell obtaining amongst the Santals. In all the ceremonials attending death, the members of the tribe take all possible precautions so that the released spirit may not haunt the abode of his near and dear ones, and may be admitted by the gods after proper purification. The other aim of the rituals is to see that the spirit may have rest, after all the toils and turmoils of 761 life, along with the ancestors. It is with a supernatural fear that the Santal looks upon death, the

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most mysterious of all episodes in human life. He associates a death in the tribe as an event which necessitates segregation of the family and the clan visited by the calamity, and not until they undergo ceremonial purification, are they thought entitled to the fuller life of the tribe, and this re-union is effected by a final community meal.

In all these socio-religious rites, the whole Santal society of the locality acts like one man. Here is a supernatural danger visiting a family. Unless the full co-operation of the tribe is received, it may be an occasion for the unconscious contamination to injure the tribe itself by its mysterious infection. So the man affected by a death in the family looks up to the tribe for help and sympathy, and the tribe in its turn helps its members during the crisis, by propitiating the super-human powers beyond our ken, who alone know the key to the mysterious phenomena round about humanity.

It is very easy to notice here also, the undoubted influence of Hinduism in the funeral customs of the Santals. But, whereas the Hindus have universalised the individual with the eternal essence, and have woven a theory of universal humanity by offering *Pindas* even to the unknown dead, their formula being "*Jagaddhitaya Krishnaya*," (to Sri Krishna, the Lord of the Universe, for the good of the Universe), the Santal, although not dreaming

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of going so far, has, according to his own ideas, sought to propitiate the departed spirit and his ancestors by suitable libations in the interests of tribal solidarity, which is his first concern on earth.

This tribal unity under a rigid frame-work serves the Santal as a bulwark against unforeseen dangers, supernatural powers, anti-social activities of the members of the tribe, and hosts of other malignant powers and influences. So it is that the tribe has built up a social organisation and customs intended to fuse the diverse elements into a homogeneous whole, and has, by appropriate rituals, ceremonials and libations, sought to establish a medium for communion with the invisible powers that guard their destinies.